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## **JAPAN'S MASTER FENCER ACCEPTS INVITATION TO COMPETE IN KENTUCKY DERBY**

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, April 6, 2019)** – **Katsumi** and **Yasuyo Yoshizawa's** Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby competitor **Master Fencer (Jpn)** has accepted an invitation to participate in the 145<sup>th</sup> running of the Grade I, \$3 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve on Saturday, May 5 at Churchill Downs.

Trained by 48-year-old former jockey **Koichi Tsunoda**, Master Fencer accumulated 19 points on the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby. His 2019 campaign included a fast-closing second in the \$310,830 Fukuryu at Nakayama Racecourse on March 31 and a fourth-place effort in the \$330,506 Hyacinth Stakes at Tokyo Racecourse on Feb. 17.

"It is an honor to be able to participate in one of the world's greatest races," Katsumi Yoshizawa said. "In Japan, kids in grade school have a yearly athletic competition that the whole family and close friends all get very excited about. They hope when their children perform they do well but, of course, parents most of all want their children to come back safely. That is how I feel about Master Fencer. I hope he comes back from the race safely most of all. I feel lucky to be able to race my horse in Kentucky."

Katsumi Yoshizawa owns and operates a **Yoshizawa Stable** – a private training facility with three locations throughout Japan. Yoshizawa's training operation has been responsible for six-time Grade I winner **Gold Ship**, 2014 Longines World Best Racehorse and three-time Grade I-winning **Just a Way** and prominent Japanese sire **Tanino Gimlet**. Yoshizawa has been a prominent buyer at the Keeneland September Yearling Sale for more than a decade including purchasing Master Fencer's dam, **Sexy Zamurai**, for \$110,000 in 2005.

Tsunoda began training in 2011 following a 22-year career in the saddle and had his first graded stakes winner in 2013 with **Bel Canto**. As a jockey, Tsunoda won 713 races including 10 JRA Grade Is.

Master Fencer is a 3-year-old chestnut-son of Just a Way (JPN) out of Sexy Zamurai. The colt has two victories and two runner-up finishes in six starts with earnings of \$234,392. He would become the first Japanese-bred colt to run in the Kentucky Derby.

First staged in 2017, the "Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve" is a separate sequence of four races from America's 35-race "Road to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve" series. Only one invitation to compete in the Kentucky Derby is extended with preference given to the horses with the most points in the "Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve" series.

Master Fencer finished fourth in Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby points with 19 but the top three finishers – **Der Flug** (40 points), **Oval Ace** (30) and **Nova Lenda** (20) – were not Triple Crown nominated and declined the invitation.

Two horses based in Japan have run in the Kentucky Derby: **Ski Captain** (14<sup>th</sup> in 1995) and **Lani** (ninth in 2016). **U Carrot Farm's Epicharis (Jpn)** was the 2017 point leader after a victory in the Hyacinth. He'd later run second in the UAE Derby (GII) but quarantine matters made it problematic for the colt to be seriously considered for the Derby. Instead, Epicharis (Jpn) targeted the Belmont Stakes (GI) but was scratched on the morning of the race after inflammation was detected in his right front leg.

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